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The Employment Manager and Applied Vocational Guidance

By IDA MAY WILSON

EMPLOYMENT management has so recently been given professional standing that we have been concerned more with forms and methods than with the manager and his training. Industry's amazing growth has demanded the immediate and material. Shall we now pause to consider the less immediate and immaterial?

It is our belief that the cornerstone of greatest success in understanding people is a broad and liberal education. Lives there an employment manager who has studied, read and experienced sufficiently to be perfectly qualified to interview all classes of help, all individuals? To follow their progress and make adjustments when necessary until every person in the plant has the best job he is able to fill in the interests of himself and of the firm? We reflect with a degree of complacency that education, reading and experience are relative terms, the desirable quantity forever the elusive *N*.

He has not a liberal education who has not learned to know people, what they think, what they do, their limitations, their possibilities. Sociology, psychology and labor economics the schools teach, but after the principles of these studies have been inculcated, it remains for the student to go to living sources for vocational information if he would stem the tide of aimless drifters. He must learn how the world's work is done in the office, the factory, the field. An increasing fund of knowledge may be gleaned from the vocational texts and current periodicals, but as vocational guidance is only less new than employment management, the chief source of information is the occupations themselves. Each should be studied from two standpoints. The nature of the occupations should be analyzed in order to make specifications; their requirements in workers in way of training, experience and personal qualities come next. New vocations multiply like the loaves and the fishes; old vocations change over night. New values are given working conditions in

these days when the elimination of shadows is considered a serious economic problem. The vocational director can never reach a calm where he may rest his oars, satisfied that he knows all that he should know. The undercurrent of progress will drag him to an unknown sea unless he pulls steadily towards the receding goal of better service.

Real employment management is vocational guidance. It develops the source of labor supply, makes right selections of workers, places them properly, does intelligent follow-up work, transfers and adjusts and promotes until every employe in the plant has the best possible job. And it is more than this. It is social engineering, not only for those selected for the plant, but for all the applicants that for any reason cannot be taken into the organization. To succeed in a large way the employment manager must deal not only with the labor requisitions of the day, but with those of all the days to come. With a keen eye on development of sources of labor supply, he will weigh the possibilities of each rejected candidate for employment, and give that candidate a vision of himself as a trained, efficient worker in an occupation for which he seems fitted. With those who have not passed the formative years the possibilities are numerous, and the vista shown must be wide and long. But with the majority of rejected applicants the formative years have passed, and circumstance has to a large extent shaped the life.

It is pitiful to review the number of applicants who ask vaguely for work of any kind. Many of these are intelligent men and women with latent possibilities. A few months ago a neat young matron of this class came into our office. She had a grammar school education and the common experience of the untrained. She had been a clerk in a retail store, she had served tables in a restaurant, she had mangled in a laundry. Inquiry drew out the fact that she had liked her arithmetic best of her school studies. On our request she did readily a problem in fractions and another in decimals. We advised her to take a course in operating a bookkeeping machine. Our plant was at that time combing the country for a number of such operators, as commercial high school and business schools generally are not even yet alive to the need for these operators. We succeeded in getting the required number only after days of searching and vexing delays. We

explained to the applicant the opportunities in this field, the salaries paid, the nature of the work, and we discussed its probable future. As she had a child to provide for, we secured her a part-time position in a city in which such a course was offered by a bookkeeping machine company. With little time and effort on our part, the young woman is now in the class of trained workers, earning an excellent salary. This is but one of many cases in which we have been able to persuade applicants who have drifted from one small job to another, to prepare themselves for a real job. Lack of ambition in this direction is rare. Thought has not been directed towards definite training for a line of work within their possibilities of success, and they have not known where to go to learn about the preparation for any vocation. Their friends are like themselves—drifters until by chance caught up by one interested in making human material into the best product for which it was designed.

If the employment manager gives vocational advice and information painstakingly to rejected applicants, he will presently have built up in the community of the plant an excellent source of labor supply, and he will have increased the good will of the plant. Employees living at home are a small factor in labor turnover. They have community interests and family ties to anchor them to service. Organized industry profits directly by applied vocational guidance. And the employment manager should be able to act as vocational guide.

In these days of rapid production, laths, power conveyors that handle the product from raw material to the waiting freight cars, and full automatics even in our counting, calling and filing systems,—all such classes of labor must be better trained. Industry demands constructive service from its workers, most of all from those who have any part in moulding men's destinies.

Labor can never go back. The scarcity of labor has brought out inventions to do every kind of work that does not require brain. And as we stood a few months ago in one of the country's greatest war industries, and watched long rows of huge automatics use tool after tool with precision and toss the finished product out at regular intervals, it seemed that a substitute had been found for brain. But while we looked there came a jarring note in the loud purring of the machines. Then it was that a man appeared. Quietly and effectively he plied his trade,

and the monster purred once more. Even the full automatic must have the tool setter in the background. The handy man is passing, the trained man is rising to a higher plane of skill.

Experience has been for many employers the sole criterion by which a man was judged. Executives now know that a man may have done a thing badly for ten years. We ask a man what he can do, and to show us how he does it. There was a time when employers delayed decisions until they looked up references. Was there ever a man who could not get recommendation from someone in a position of authority? We recall an experience in a machine concern. A rival company sent a form reference to be filled out. The plant official to whom it was sent remarked, "Well, Brown was no good here, but I won't keep him from working for the M—— Company." Men seem to feel that it is a breach of the unwritten code to say anything against a man who has given their names as references. When the sudden and unprecedented need for workers sprang from the World War, references went into the discard with other slow processes. Statements of experience went with them. Skilled workers instead of merely experienced workers were sought by production men.

Vocational training received the thought of the chiefs of industry. Our government established intensive training courses. Organized industries throughout the country opened vestibule schools. A few colleges and secondary schools tardily followed. Today a man in a government plant is paid a good wage while learning to do almost any part of its work. One great industry trains foremen for their job as teachers. Another transforms skilled mechanics into teachers of newly inducted workers through the medium of schools. A school has recently opened to teach firemen their job. It is the era of training for every vocation. Efficiency experts figure that there is a scientific time study for even variable operations. Operations are divided into tasks; each task is studied until motions are reduced to the minimum. Training is everywhere the essential thing. It behooves the vocational director to keep abreast of the vocational demands and the places where training may be secured to meet them. The employment manager who has this knowledge applies it to the plant workers who seek promotions, the new employes who aim to develop into experts, and the rejected applicants who are potential employes.